Import of wheat inspite of unmanageable buffer stock

3723. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of FOOD be pleased to state:

(a) whether the country had to import two million tonnes of wheat within two years inspite of having an unmanageable buffer stock of 35 million tonnes of wheat;

(b) whether Government's attention in this regard has been drawn to an article published in the 'Hindustan Times', dated 24th April, 1997 captioned "wheat crisis threatens food security" and that "gross mismanagement of food can drain India's economy";

(c) if so, the reasons therefor and reaction of the Government thereto; and

(d) whether Government are in favour of appointment of any new Commission for farmers of the country by disbanding the present Agricultural Costs and Prices Commission (CACP) which has outlived its utility and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND MINISTER OF FOOD AND MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI CHATURANAN MISHRA): (a) The stock position of wheat in the Central Pool during 1995 ranged between a minimum of 87.20 lakh tonnes in April to a maximum of 192.21 lakh tonnes in July and in 1996 it ranged between a minimum of 77.69 in April tc a maximum of 141.31 lakh tonnes in July.

Considering the relevant factors like stock position of foodgrains in the Central Pool, production of foodgrains in the country, trend of procurement for Public Distribution System/other welfare scheme and open market prices, Government had decided to import upto 2 million tonnes of wheat each in 1996-97 and 1997-98, to augment availability of wheat in the country.

(b) and (c) Yes, Sir. The article is basically on the prices of agricultural commodities and has claimed that the present pricing formula followed by the Commission on Agricultural Prices and Costs has outlived its utility. Agricultural Price Policy followed by the Government over the years has contributed significantly to agricultural development and increase in production. Minimum Support Prices are fixed by the Government in the form of a guarantee to the producers that the prices will not be allowed to fall below these minimum levels. Farmers are encouraged to adopt modern technology i.e. use of high yielding varieties of seeds, chemical fertilizers, spray of pesticides, etc. Government is committed to safeguard the interest of both, the farmers and the consumers.

(d) The Government is not in favour of appointment of any new Commission for farmers of the country by disbanding the present CACP.

Import of wheat and price difference between domestic and imported wheat

3724. SHRI LAKKHIRAM AGARWAL:
DR. SHRIKANT RAMCHANDRA JICHKAR:
SHRIMATI BASANTI SARMA:

Will the Minister of FOOD be pleased to state:

(a) the quantity of wheat imported during 1996-97 and likely to be imported in the near future;

(b) the quantity which has been imported till now;

(c) the per-unit cost of this imported wheat, including transportation charges;

(d) the difference in price between imported wheat and the price which is being paid to our farmers for domestic wheat; and

(e) the reasons for wheat import?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND MINISTER OF FOOD AND MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES,